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ABSTRACT

The keynote of this document is "empowerment." Children can and should have opportunities from an early age to take part in the significant events in their world. Learning activities in this curriculum provide a general context in which young children can explore and appreciate various definitions of participation for elementary school children and provide age-appropriate understanding of the process of political elections. Chapter 1, "Defining Participation," presents an exploration of the ways children experience their own and others' participation in the world. Chapter 2, "The Empowering Classroom," looks at learning activities and classroom structures that give children the direct experience of responsible participation in their everyday world. Chapter 3, "Decision Making," examines models of ways groups make decisions and provides opportunities for students to try out each method. In Chapter 4, "Elections: Taking Part in the Political Process," activities help children understand and participate in developmentally-appropriate ways, in the events surrounding an election. Finally, Chapter 5, "Making a Difference," focuses children's attention on issues and areas where their efforts can contribute to improving their surroundings. (CK)

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"Our actions send ripples toward future shores."

An Elementary Curriculum in the PARTICIPATION SERIES

SO 023 946

EDUCATORS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Taking Part

An Elementary Curriculum in the Participation Series

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This Series Was a Project of
the Boston Area Chapter of ESR

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EDUCATORS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY seeks to make social responsibility an integral part of education in our schools. We create and disseminate new ways of teaching and learning that will help young people participate in shaping a better world. ESR provides consultation, educational resources, and professional services to teachers, administrators and schools.

Our programs and products present divergent viewpoints, stimulate critical thinking about controversial issues, teach creative and productive ways of dealing with differences, promote cooperative problem solving, and foster informed decision making. We help young people develop a personal commitment to the well-being of other people and the planet, and encourage participation in the democratic process.

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Preface

In 1981, a group of teachers came together around a shared concern about the effect on children of living in a nuclear age. From this group emerged an organization, Educators For Social Responsibility, whose goal is to provide materials, education, and support for teachers and students in dealing with this issue.

Through research conducted in classrooms over the past ten years, ESR has found that students express as they get older a growing sense of powerlessness and even cynicism about the possibilities for any individual or group to help create a better world. They do not identify inspiring models of individuals and organizations who have made a difference. Many view government as indifferent to public opinion and the reins of government as beyond their reach. They do not see themselves as creators of policy, but rather as cogs in a wheel of inevitability. In light of these findings, of the low voter turnouts in recent elections, and of the growing apathy among the general public, we are addressing the question, "How can we best educate to encourage conviction, commitment, and participation?"

This Participation series is a first step in responding to that question. During the winter of 1984, a group of Boston area ESR teachers began brainstorming what a curriculum on participation might look like. Over a six month period of thinking, writing, rethinking, and rewriting, these teachers developed five short curriculum guides as a start toward an education for involvement and action. We submit this guide to you as our initial response to a question we believe will stay with us for the rest of our careers.

We can think of no more important educational effort than helping children find their power and their place in creating a safe and peaceful future. We realize that this will challenge and stretch us as teachers. As you use this series and develop ideas and materials of your own, we hope you will share with us the results of your efforts so that we will all continue to grow in our thinking. Creating this series was empowering for those who participated. We hope it will be empowering to those who use it. In the words of a friend, "Our actions send ripples toward future shores." We thank you for your concern and courage in taking up this challenge.

Introduction

The purpose of this book is twofold. First, we are aware that young people today often have feelings of apathy, cynicism, and powerlessness over the forces that determine their lives. As adults, a great many of them will undoubtedly join the ranks of those who choose neither to exercise their power to vote in political elections nor to participate in other kinds of important decisions which affect us all. We feel that the development of the skills and attitudes of empowered participation cannot be delayed until adulthood. If they are to become comfortable and fully integrated characteristics of our lives, they must be developed when we are young. In this curriculum guide, we explore some learning activities and elements of classroom climate which help lay a crucial foundation in participation for elementary school children. By helping children learn to make a difference in their own lives now, we hope to point them toward the future experience of an empowered adulthood.

A second, more immediate purpose of this book is to provide the children we teach with an age-appropriate understanding of the process of political elections. This is not a course in government or civics. In fact, we have chosen to present little, if any, specific information about the election process. It is, rather, a way to encourage children's awareness of what is happening in the world around them during the months leading up to an election. We believe that a clearer understanding of this essential way that citizens can participate in the political process will help children to see that individuals can make a difference, as well as to envision their own future roles as citizens in a democratic society.

Throughout this book, we have used the term *empowerment* to denote the positive effect on children of discovering their self-worth, their ability to make meaningful decisions, and their potential to act and to make things happen in their lives. Empowerment is a heady feeling for any of us, a welcome relief from the discouragement we so often feel when confronted with the daily headlines and headaches of contemporary life. In a recent brainstorming session on the meaning of empowerment, a group of educators came up with the following associations: feeling part of; having an influence on something; active engagement in the world; feeling strong; feeling good about oneself; being listened to; persevering; seeing connections between ideas and experiences; being creative; feeling connected to other people; accepting responsibility; doing what you believe in; "going for it" fully; sharing from the heart; and knowing in your heart that something is right. These are the kinds of experiences we would like to facilitate for our students. We believe this is the goal of participation.

Empowerment, then, is at the heart of this book. We begin in Chapter 1, "Defining Participation," with an exploration of the ways the children we teach

experience their own and others' participation in the world. Chapter 2, "The Empowering Classroom," looks at learning activities and classroom structures that give children the direct experience of responsible participation in their everyday world. Chapter 3, "Decision Making," examines a number of models of ways groups make decisions and provides opportunities for students to try out each of them. In Chapter 4, "Elections: Taking Part in the Political Process," we look at activities to help children understand and participate, in developmentally-appropriate ways, in the exciting events taking place around them during an election. Finally, Chapter 5, "Making a Difference," focuses children's attention on issues and areas where their efforts can contribute to making the world around them a better place.

Chapter 1

Defining Participation

In this chapter we will explore ways to help students see that none of us is without importance as a member of our society. Although we may often feel like passive or invisible onlookers to what goes on around us, there is almost always a wide range of participatory roles we can occupy—from member of the audience all the way up to leader of the band—and there is value in each style of participation. We need to learn to appreciate all the aspects of participation, and we need to learn to move comfortably among them. Participation, then, might be defined as helping to make something happen—and what we want children to learn is that what happens in the world around us depends on the ways we choose to participate.

The learning activities that follow provide a general context in which young children can explore and appreciate various definitions of participation. As with most of the classroom activities in this book, the emphasis is not on specific content that the teacher presents and the students take in, but rather on a process that both teacher and students go through together. This process begins with the ideas, associations, and questions that the children themselves bring to a topic. From this starting point focusing on "where they are at"—we then can help children examine, organize, hypothesize, research, and extend what they know. Finally, we can help them synthesize their discoveries into a new level of understanding that remains grounded in their own experience. It is our hope that teachers will use these suggestions as a jumping off point for their own thinking, adapting and extending them to fit the specific needs and character of their own classes.

Activities on Participation

1. Conduct an introductory brainstorming session with children in which they can express any ideas they have on participation. The word "participation" may not be the most meaningful one to use, especially with young children, so you might consider alternative expressions—making a difference, taking part, joining in, helping out, making something happen, etc. Phrase your questions in such a way that the children can look at participation from several points of view—e.g., "What are some ways people make a difference in the world around them?"; "Who else might contribute to that activity?"; "What could people do to help each other out?"; "Are there other ways of joining in which might not be so obvious?"; "How else could people help each other make something happen?"; "What might they do that would make things harder?" and so on. Write their responses on large sheets of paper to keep posted for reference. Avoid any temptation to analyze or discuss people's responses; this is a time to generate as many ideas as possible without judgment.

2. Extend this process of generating information by having the children "interview" friends and family members on their ideas about ways people participate. Reopen the brainstorming session with a question such as, "What else can you think of about participation?" or "Did you come up with any new thoughts from talking to other people?" Add new ideas to the list.

3. As the students' own ideas accumulate, patterns and categories will probably start to emerge. Begin to examine the information from the point of view of organizing it into meaningful sub-topics—e.g., "Things Kids Can Take Part In," or "Ways People Make a Difference at Home." Find categories in which to group specific examples of participation—e.g., leaders, onlookers, helpers, critics, and so on—but be sure to include the children in the process of defining the categories. Encourage the children to reflect on the ideas they brainstormed and to organize them in ways that make sense to them.

4. Have the children look at familiar situations and identify the different kinds of participation in each. Possible situations to consider might include a group game or sports event; the production of a play or TV show; the process by which a food item gets from the farm to our dinner table; the manufacture of a toy or household item; the voyage of a letter through the mail from sender to receiver; the election of a public official (see the chapter on "Elections: Taking Part in the Political Process" later in this book). Since neither students nor teachers will be completely familiar with all the participatory roles in these and similar situations, feel free to rely on imagination and what "sounds good" in creating these lists. The goal, after all, is to increase children's awareness of the many ways people contribute to the way the world is, not to come up with exact descriptions of the processes in question.

5. On the other hand, a fascinating spin-off of the preceding activity might be to research one or more of the situations examined for the different roles of participation it demonstrates. Take a field trip to the local post office; invite someone who works in a publishing company into the classroom as a guest speaker; do library research on the manufacturing process of an item of interest. No matter what approach you take, remember to point out repeatedly the many different ways people take part in the processes, how essential each is, and the ways they help each other do a better job.

6. Have children interview their parents and other adults about their jobs and any other organizations and activities they participate in. Work with the students to develop a questionnaire that gets to the heart of the information you are looking for. They might find out ways people feel they help make something happen; ways other people help them out; ways they contribute to others' efforts; how they see themselves taking part in the world. Let the children share, compare, and discuss the responses to their interviews.

7. Have the students look at the variety of ways they themselves are participants in real-life processes around them. Typical examples might be coming to school, playing on a soccer team, being a member of a Brownie troop, taking music lessons, helping their parents on a voter registration drive, setting the table at home, baby sitting for younger children, checking a book out of the library, thinking of something to do when a group of friends is bored on a summer day, etc. Because children's opportunities to participate are more limited than those of adults, most of their activities may not seem to them to represent powerful forms of participation. Help them see that it is not only

leadership and organized efforts for social change that count: just being present, giving support and approval to an activity, and being one of a number of people in an audience are also valued ways to take part.

8. Give special attention to helping the children look at different ways people can participate in discussions. Although it may often seem to be the case, it is not necessarily those who have a lot to say—those who talk at length, those who speak out frequently, or even those whose statements seem the most interesting and valuable—who are the strongest participants in a discussion. People who listen carefully, who facilitate and clarify others' contributions, who ask thoughtful questions, and who otherwise support the flow and progress of the discussion, are all participating in a strong, positive way.

   You might try helping the children observe their own group discussions and identify the different participation roles. (Sometimes it is helpful with older children to have half the class sit outside the discussion as silent observers, forming a circle around those who are talking. The observers can watch the process and take notes to share later on the ways they see people participating.) The particular names assigned to the various discussion roles are not important in themselves; most important is that the students be the ones to identify and "label" them. But you may find the following list of "participation roles" in a task-oriented discussion group helpful in guiding your thinking as well as that of your students:

   Organizer (makes lists, gives directions, lines up materials)
   Encourager (shows enthusiasm for people's ideas, supports people when they talk or try something new)
   Idea person (comes up with a lot of suggestions, or with one very good one)
   Good humor person (keeps the activity fun by making funny remarks in a way that keeps people enjoying what they're doing—not put-down jokes)
   Cooperator (responds to organizers, who can't get anything done unless there are good cooperators in the group)
   Listener (listens intently when people give ideas, so there is a sense of calm and concentration in the group. Without listeners, everyone's ideas would just bounce off the air and not go anywhere.)
   Stick-to-itive person (when the going gets tough, this person sticks in there and keeps thinking, listening, trying, concentrating)
   Problem finder (contributes by seeing what's *wrong* with the way the group is solving the problem. Having this pointed out helps the group get on the right track.)
   Detail detective (notices little things in the instructions or in the problem-solving method that are important to pay attention to)
   Clarifier (can use words well to explain what other people don't understand)
   Includer (makes sure everybody gets a chance to talk)
   (There are, of course, other ways to describe "participation roles" in discussions and problem-solving groups. The above list appeared as part of a group cooperation activity in ESR's curriculum guide, Perspectives: A Teaching Guide to Concepts of Peace, now out of print.)

9. Point out to the children the important power we exercise in the marketplace—that when we purchase something, we are endorsing that product, and conversely, we can either decline to endorse a product by not buying it, or make an even stronger statement by boycotting it. Children may be unaware of their

economic power. Have them look at advertising on TV that is directed at them and the choices they are asked to make with their purchasing power. Help them see, too, that they can further exert power by writing letters expressing their views about a product to manufacturers and advertisers. (An excellent resource on consumer information for children is the bimonthly magazine PENNY POWER, published by CONSUMER REPORTS, Box 2878, Boulder, CO 80322.)

10. Explore the importance of learning itself as a form of participation. Children's major job is, after all, to learn (not just academically, but socially and emotionally as well) so that they can eventually assume adult responsibilities in the most effective way. Look at the lives of people—both famous and less well-known—whose participation the children admire. What learning steps led to their empowerment? In what ways are they still learning? What basic skills are most useful to them? How does the learning that children are doing now form a basis for future empowerment? Related to this is the importance of being well-informed about the news and issues of concern. Why do citizens need to be well-informed? How is participation affected when people are more or less well-informed? How do people inform themselves? How can children be informed about things that matter?

11. Help the children look at ways of varying and increasing their participation in the world around them. How does it feel to become a more active participant in a discussion; to write a letter to the newspaper sharing your opinion on something that concerns you; to take the time to find out about something you want to know more about? In what ways can you help others participate more fully? What things might hinder them? Under what circumstances might you wish to participate more actively? When might you wish to have less participation? How do people choose which areas of their lives to take a more active part in and which to participate less in?

12. Try an "assembly line" activity to experience the way each person's small job contributes to the group effort. Tasks which might lend themselves to this activity are folding origami "peace cranes" for a mobile for public display; checking a stack of lengthy math papers by having each child check one or two problems and then pass the paper on; or making sets of nearly-identical greeting cards by having each child do a specific part of the design. Discuss "specialized" participation. Consider its advantages and disadvantages. What is the role of specialists in various areas of our lives? In what ways are we ourselves "specialists"?

13. As an exercise in further exploring ways people participate, let the class choose a group task to accomplish cooperatively. It might be holding a bake sale to raise money for a public service organization, putting on a class play, ensuring that everyone learn all their multiplication facts, or any of a number of projects the whole class can work on. Identify the participatory roles required to accomplish the task. Organize to get it done. Analyze the process as it goes on. Recognize those who facilitate the accomplishment of the task and, gently, those whose behaviors hinder its accomplishment. Help the students find ways they can get it done most effectively and most enjoyably, and guide them to be aware of the many subtle ways different ways of participating affect both the process and the outcome. Most important, help them see ways they can support each other to do a better job.

14. Throughout all the activities you do with your class to explore the meaning of participation, have the children use writing, drawing, cartoon strips, role playing, skits, and other creative ways to organize and present their ideas. Whether it is a handmade poster listing the reasons people should vote, an original picture book on ways a child can take part and make a difference in the community, or a report on how an automobile is made, it will be useful for the children to create tangible expressions of some of the things they are learning.

15. Finally, don't overlook the power of publicity for children's learning projects. Invite other classes to view a display of work from your study of participation. Write an article about the study for the school or local newspaper. Make a class presentation to the parents. Provide public recognition to the students for what they have accomplished. The rewards of affirmation encourage further participation. It is our goal to set children off on a lifetime journey of empowerment through their conscious choices to take part in the richness, complexity, and challenge of the world we live in.

Chapter 2

The Empowering Classroom

We believe that a major goal of education is to empower citizens to make independent judgments, to take thoughtful responsibility for vital decisions in the world around them, and to work effectively with others to bring about a just and peaceful world. This education must begin at an early age. From the early elementary years on, we need to provide children with direct experiences of active questioning and participation in the real-life processes around them. The children we teach need to experience themselves as unique, responsible participants whose opinions are respected and whose actions make a difference. They need to grow up with a comfortable awareness of their empowerment so that they can step easily into the challenging roles that will face them as adults.

The classroom is the setting for a large part of children's most significant experience. It is their "real" world, the place where they explore and grow cognitively, emotionally, socially, and morally. During their gradually unfolding day-to-day and year-to-year classroom experience, they take in and interpret what happens to them, learning from it all. Not only do they learn from the content we carefully prepare and present to them, but they learn as much—and perhaps more—from the way in which we interact with them and facilitate their interactions with each other. Often they fail to learn what we think we are teaching; and at the same time they learn a vast and intricate body of more subtle knowledge. Sometimes called the "hidden curriculum," this subtle learning can encompass the most basic attitudes about self and others, about one's value and role in the world.

Because the classroom experience can have such a profound effect on children's views of themselves and their place in the world, it is important for us as teachers to focus our attention on the environment we create. As we plan and implement curriculum, as we structure the daily schedule, and as we supervise the human interactions constantly taking place, what is the message children are getting? Are they eager or reluctant to participate? Do they experience success or failure, enthusiasm or boredom, validation or alienation, competence or helplessness? What can we do to create a classroom environment that encourages the growth of the positive and powerful qualities children will need as they grow through adolescence and into adulthood? How can we best teach for optimum participation and empowerment?

In the discussion that follows we shall look at some of the ways in which we might create an "empowering classroom." The concepts we discuss have general areas of emphasis: safety, affirmation, responsibility, relevance, and cooperation. The sections below briefly introduce these concepts and provide an outline of some classroom activities which might illustrate them. We present these activities in their most germinal form, in the hope that teachers will use them as starting points for their own thinking.

Empowerment Through Feeling Safe

In an empowering classroom, the children experience a feeling of *safety* which enables them to explore their relationship to the world around them. They have the opportunity to take risks without fear of embarrassment. They feel free to make mistakes and to use the information gained from their mistakes as valuable feedback for learning. Energy that might normally be used to protect a limited self-image or to defend weaknesses is freed for use in more productive tasks. Exploration replaces overcautiousness; self-confidence replaces self-consciousness. Respect for others and from others leads to greater self-respect. In a safe learning environment, children can take a much clearer look at their ideas, fantasies, feelings, and experiences than they could if they had to be constantly on guard against failure or ridicule. This sense of safety makes possible a far deeper and more thoughtful kind of learning. Below are some guidelines you can use to make your classroom a safe learning environment.

1. From the beginning of the year establish clear rules which protect everyone's physical safety, property, and feelings. A set of three good ones to apply to interactions might be simply: Respect (or Don't Hurt) Other People's Bodies; Respect (or Don't Hurt) Other People's Property; and Respect (or Don't Hurt) Other People's Feelings. As a group, discuss the rules, their meanings, their implications. Even children with poor impulse control can gain a great deal of security from these simple rules, clearly spelled out and frequently reinforced. (For a discussion of ways children can become more responsible for the mutual observance of the rules, see the section below on "Empowerment Through Responsibility.")

2. Make your classroom a safe place in which to make mistakes. Share openly and often the matter-of-fact reality that everyone makes mistakes, that anyone who pretends not to is not being truthful, that mistakes provide us with feedback to learn from, and that you will not tolerate any ridicule of anyone who makes a mistake. Call attention to your own honest mistakes when they occur, and demonstrate self-acceptance as well as an openness to what mistakes can teach you. Encourage children to explore such questions as why people are sometimes ashamed and embarrassed about their mistakes; how people feel when they're made fun of for making a mistake; lessons to be learned from specific mistakes; personal examples of mistakes—small ones, serious ones, comical ones, instructive ones, ones which were hard to admit. Use mistakes as the subject of drawing, creative writing, and role-playing activities. Let mistakes become so familiar and acceptable that they no longer have the power to limit the children's explorations.

3. Create a safe forum in which children can share experiences, ideas, and feelings. Hold regular, open "sharing times" (group discussions, with children seated in a circle so that everyone can see everyone else, make a good structure). Establish clear expectations and rules about listening, taking turns, communicating support and acceptance, and not expressing judgment or criticism. Provide frequent opportunities for children to share whatever may be on their minds. Use the sharing times also to deal with subjects you perceive as relevant—e.g., the death of a classroom pet—and sometimes explore with the children a more "formal" topic—e.g., "A time I got hurt," or "If I had three wishes."

4. As much as possible, be open and honest with children about your feelings and the reasons for what you do. Children are uncannily quick to perceive hypocrisy and manipulation—indeed, a distressing number of them seem to expect and take for granted these behaviors from adults—and they respond with guardedness and mistrust that may be so subtle as to go unrecognized. If they can trust you to be "up front" with them, then it is safer for them to take risks, explore the unfamiliar, and tolerate uncertainty.

Empowerment Through Validation

In an empowering classroom, the children experience *validation* for who they really are. They know they are valued members of the class. They are part of a caring environment in which they can discover and share their ideas, questions, and feelings. They can count on respect for the areas in which they lack confidence as well as for the things they're proud of. They become thoroughly comfortable expressing and receiving appreciation for their efforts and contributions. They experience themselves as competent learners with less dependency on measuring themselves either against unrealistic standards or against each other. They are validated not only for the qualities they have in common, but also for their uniqueness. An empowering classroom celebrates the diversity of experiences, interests, talents, and points of view among its individual class members. The following guidelines and activities will help your students to experience validation and affirmation.

1. Discuss with your students the meaning of affirmation, pride, arrogance, bragging, worthiness, self-esteem, superiority, inferiority, humility, modesty, and other related terms. When is it all right (and not all right) to be proud of who we are or what we have accomplished? When is it all right (and not all right) to be critical of who we are and what we have accomplished? How can we acknowledge good points in ourselves without being boastful? What might some of the consequences of having low self-esteem? What could we do to help someone with low self-esteem? etc. Help the children understand that it is important to be affirmed and that there are appropriate ways to experience affirmation from oneself and from others.

2. More than once at the beginning of the year, and from time to time as the year goes on, conduct an activity of self-validation for your students. Suggestions include the following: Have children make lists of ten (or twenty, or whatever number is appropriate) things they like about themselves and then share all or part of the list aloud; have them write or draw about a time they did something they were proud of or about a quality they like in themselves, and share the stories and drawings; have them create "About Me" books in which they record positive things; listen to things they share about themselves in conversations and reinforce self-affirming statements by saying such things as, "It sounds like you feel good that you ..." or "You must be proud of ..."

3. Provide situations in which children can give validation to each other. Teach them phrases such as "Something I appreciate about you is ..." or "I admire you for ..." or "It makes me feel good when you ..." In a circle discussion, let them take turns sharing sincere validations (you can help them to be specific and to give examples of the behaviors cited). Demonstrate this kind of statement during the classroom day as you note children's positive qualities and actions, and encourage students to give validations to each other for the good things they

notice. Put validations in writing—perhaps a "You Are Special" book made for children's birthdays, in which everyone writes validating comments or anecdotes; or a life-size outline drawing of each child on which others attach "medals" they've made to affirm positive qualities; or creative writing projects that focus on character sketches and stories about each other's good points. Help students be on the lookout for things to affirm in others—they can observe a friend in secret and then surprise her or him at the end of the day with an unexpected affirmation. And, of course, give lavish praise to those who notice and validate others—special affirmation to the affirmers!

4. Provide generous affirmation for work well done, for effort, for improvement. Post examples of work students are proud of everywhere in the room, letting them participate in the selection and changing the displays often. Be sure not to highlight just the most outstanding work; it is important for students to learn to appreciate all levels of performance and to accept different kinds of contributions as significant. Give recognition to simple competence as well as excellence, and help students appreciate the subtleties in the range and variety of work which deserves recognition. Use stickers, written comments, and public praise to reinforce accomplishments. Your students will internalize the attitudes you communicate about who they are and what they do.

5. Conduct activities that focus on things children have in common: a "Commonalities" questionnaire is one way. Students respond to such questions as "What is your favorite flavor of ice cream? your favorite thing to do on a Saturday? a pet you'd like to have? Who is your favorite singer? What would you buy if you had fifty dollars to spend on a gift for yourself? What would you do if you saw a flying saucer?" etc. They can then share their responses, looking for other people with similar answers. Another way is to assign pairs or small groups of children to interview each other and come up with a list of five (or ten, or twenty) things they have in common, with special recognition given to the most unusual and imaginative discoveries.

6. Using the same kind of activities as those above, celebrate children's differences. Help them to discover things about themselves and each other which are unique, to share their discoveries with confidence and pride, and to give validation for them. Although children may want to be "just like" their peers in order to have a secure sense of belonging—and this can be normal and healthy—they also need reassurance that the infinite variations on the human theme are acceptable too.

7. Pay special attention to the cultural diversity represented in your classroom. Research family ancestry and national origins, birthplaces and places students have lived and traveled. Create a climate of openness to sharing the customs, language, clothing, music, food, and folktales of the different cultures represented. Use the multicultural resources available in your school to enhance awareness of the richness and diversity of the human family.

8. Use children's books as common ground for discussion. Much of the best of contemporary children's literature deals with themes of acceptance of self and appreciation for others, competence and independence, and collaboration and courage. Help children identify qualities they have in common with literary heroes and heroines. Encourage them to imagine themselves in situations they encounter in books. Affirm them for the creative, positive actions and attitudes they would choose to bring to the imagined situations.

Empowerment Through Responsibility

In an empowering classroom, the children experience genuine *responsibility* for the choices they make and for the consequences of their choices. If a major goal of schooling is to produce citizens capable of thoughtful decision making, then students need the experience of active questioning and learning and participation with others from an early age. They need practice making some of the decisions which affect their lives—real and important decisions—and responsibility for their classroom, schoolwork, and interpersonal behavior is a good starting point. Some guidelines and activities are suggested below. (For further discussion of ways we can help children assume greater responsibility for their choices, see Chapter 3, "Decision Making.")

1. Give your students some measure of responsibility for the rules that govern the classroom. In some cases, you can genuinely allow them to decide on rules and their enforcement—for example, deciding a system for who gets to be first in line or how to distribute clean-up jobs. Some rules are nonnegotiable—school hours, vacations, restrictions on leaving the building, safety codes, etc.—but students can still explore the reasons for them, as well as the way they came into being. In between these two extremes are the rules which you, the teacher, decide on. Even the most "democratic" teacher retains the power, through natural authority if nothing else, to make these decisions. Allow for an ongoing dialogue about these rules. Encourage feedback and suggestions, and share honestly the reasons and process behind the rules you make. Letting children in on the mystery behind rules does not mean giving up control to them. This kind of awareness leads to intelligent thinking and even creative suggestions by students; and even if you cannot in good conscience follow their suggestions, the very fact that they know their voices are heard can be empowering.

2. Whenever possible, incorporate children's suggestions into your procedure, and let it be clearly known who was responsible for the change and how they made it happen. When you take the their participation seriously and give it public acknowledgment, children will learn to take themselves seriously, too. A "suggestion box" or regularly scheduled discussions of the way the classroom is run can provide a formal structure for their feedback.

3. Teach your students an effective way to take responsibility for enforcing the rules that affect them most personally. The three basic rules introduced above in the section on "Empowerment Through Safety"—Respect (Do Not Hurt) Other People's Bodies/Property/Feelings—constitute a sound basis for children's first taking personal responsibility. The only person in a position to determine whether or not these rules have been broken is the individual injured by the violation. In most situations, the offended child would probably choose one of two responses: either run to the nearest adult to "tattle" about what had happened, or take "justice" into her or his own hands and lash out in retaliation. It is easy to teach children a third alternative, based on mutual respect, which goes like this: The offended child says (verbatim) "Please don't do that." The offender *must* stop whatever "that" is and say (again, verbatim) "I'm sorry." If the offender doesn't stop (which will happen often at first), the offended goes to the adult in charge, who then accompanies her or him back to the scene and silently witnesses the "Please don't do that" statement. Usually the adult presence is enough, but it can happen that offenders really have legitimate reasons for what they did. In this case, they have the right to explain—respectfully, so that it isn't taken as the start of an argument—why they did or

said what they did. The teacher can then help them negotiate a resolution in any of a number of conventional ways; and these negotiations will be more effective because the occurrences requiring teacher intervention have been dramatically reduced.

4. The teacher can facilitate acceptance of this procedure by explaining how important it is for kids to learn to communicate with each other rather than to seek an adult referee. It will also be helpful to point out to them that they use their own power when they listen to each other with respect, but turn that power over to adults when they consult needlessly. Children "get it" because it does work most of the time; and the times when adult intervention is legitimately needed become limited to cases of genuine conflict of interest rather than egocentric squabbling. If the teacher's expectation that children communicate with respect is really clear, and if the children are given specific, almost ritualized responses to use when conflicts arise, then the process works in a most liberating and empowering way.

5. Give children a voice in deciding about the physical arrangement of the classroom as much as is comfortable for you. Let them decide on desk arrangement—or at least where they wish to sit—and let them change as often as they need to. Let them decorate their desks and chairs (within reason). Give them the responsibility for bulletin board displays and for the arrangement of books in the classroom library. Let them be in charge of the science materials, games, art area, or whatever areas are particularly featured in your room. Let them make the space theirs wherever possible; and where it isn't possible, share with them the reasons.

6. Give children a voice in deciding how to use their time. If possible, use an individualized contract system in which they can participate in the choice of assignments and the time allotment for doing them. Structure frequent periods of "free" time, subject to whatever restrictions are needed for your comfort, during which they can choose among several alternatives, e.g., completing a math assignment, reading a library book, working on a creative writing or art project, writing in their journal, or playing a learning game with a friend. Establish a system of accountability for time and help them learn that freedom is not the same as license.

7. Allow children to participate in the selection and creation of learning materials. If, for example, you do handwriting exercises and word problems, let them choose the page of handwriting words to practice and the page of word problems to do. Better yet, let the students themselves create the handwriting exercise and the word problems. Teach them how to make original dittoed worksheets, utilizing used ink sheets from your masters and regular notebook paper, and let them help you run copies on the ditto machine. Let them select books for you to read aloud; let them decide on the subjects for creative writing; wherever possible give them power over the materials they learn from.

8. Give children the chance to participate in the process of teaching, evaluation, and classroom management. Start with something as simple as taking attendance. Let them gradually take charge of any areas of record keeping they can handle. If you know you are going to have a substitute teacher, let the children participate in planning the things she or he should do. Let the children explain to the rest of the class in their own way a skill or concept they know something about. As they become ready, let them prepare and present "mini-lessons" on

subjects which interest them. Give them responsibility for correcting worksheets and other assignments they have created. Take their efforts seriously so that their classmates will follow suit. Encourage their participation by taking for granted their ability to make valuable contributions to everyone's learning. In short, demystify your position of power as teacher by making your power accessible to them.

Empowerment Through Relevance

In an empowering classroom, the children also experience *relevance* in what they are learning. We all learn best when we are truly interested in what we are doing. Children come to school with a passion to find out about the world and to become competent people, looking forward to the time when they will become powerful adults. But often they "turn off" because much of the curriculum mandated for them seems uninteresting or irrelevant. Teachers themselves may often share this frustration if the mandated curriculum seems too restricted. But when both teacher and students are free to explore together what seems most relevant to them, then real learning and real empowerment can take place. Below are some ways to do this.

1. Begin the study of any new topic with one or more brainstorming sessions designed to allow the children to discover and share whatever they already know about the subject. Ask leading questions when appropriate, but do not provide any information yourself during the initial sessions. Encourage them to share any associations, questions, or ideas that come to mind without judgment or analysis. Write their ideas on large sheets of paper or on individual cards to post in the room for reference and additions as the study progresses. This brainstorming process gives the teacher a clear sense of where the class is "at" in their initial understanding, and, more important, lets the children see how extensive and colorful the knowledge they bring to a new topic actually is. (For a specific, in-depth example of this process, see the introductory activities in the chapter on "Elections: Taking Part in the Political Process" later in this book.)

2. No matter how much of your curriculum is mandated and how little discretionary time you may have, provide regular discussion time during the school week. Listen carefully to what children share so that you can be aware of new areas of interest and questions they have. Openly show your enthusiasm for what's going on in their heads—be it the latest episode in a new TV sitcom or a commitment to the plight of endangered species. Let them know that you give serious attention to the ideas they bring to school, and encourage them to pay the same kind of attention to each other.

3. Extend the process of getting in touch with individual interests by having children create "autobiographies" that include descriptions of their homes, bedrooms, "collections," toys and other possessions, family life, vacations, hobbies, and outside activities. Encourage them to share interesting elements in more detail, to bring in items from home, to draw on their parents and friends as resources, and to explore the ramifications and connections between various interests.

4. Whenever possible, follow up on the ideas individual students spontaneously share in class. It may be as simple a gesture as bringing a child's observation to the attention of the group, or as extensive as creating an entire learning unit

around a thought-provoking student question. Bring in books, articles, filmstrips, guest "experts," even personal anecdotes that relate to interests students have shared. Help them structure individual and small-group projects around their interests: library research, interviews, presentations before the class or others in the school. Creative writing, art, or dramatic projects are some of the ways in which they can explore their interests.

5. Even when it isn't possible to turn children's interests into extensive projects, look for small ways to reinforce them in the course of regular class work. You might try to create math word problems, language arts exercises, or sentences to illustrate spelling words around students' ideas. Encourage them to incorporate their own and others' interests into their school work.

6. Use journals. Give each child a special notebook in which to write on a regular basis, and set aside time for reflection and writing. Make it clear that "anything goes," and that privacy will be respected. Invite them to share parts of what they've written aloud if they wish; express your interest in reading anything they'd like to share with just you, with or without feedback; and provide the important option of keeping pages private by folding them over. Encourage them to review periodically what they've written in order to discover patterns, themes, surprising insights. Let them use ideas from their journals as the basis for more formal writing exercises. Affirm that their experiences, thoughts, and feelings are among the richest sources for exploration and learning.

7. Have your students share their explorations with others through a variety of communication activities: a class newspaper that documents their experiences and creativity; contributions to the school or local newspaper; writing (and illustrating) books based on creative ideas or on factual information that is important to them; posters and other visual displays to present information to others; oral reports, speeches, skits, or other presentations; reading the books they have written or sharing other projects with younger children; etc.

Empowerment Through Cooperation

Finally, in an empowering classroom, the children experience a form of *cooperation* that increases the success of each individual as well as of the group. Working together cooperatively is a very positive attitude-builder. Children can strengthen and stimulate each other as well as themselves when they are encouraged to share, compare, and pool their ideas and experiences. The power of individuals to make a difference in the world is multiplied by the power of those who join with them to work intelligently and effectively together. Learning to look beyond ourselves and to work harmoniously with others is essential if we are to create a more peaceful and just world. We can give children experiences with the power of cooperation and community effort in all areas of their school lives.

1. Make explicit to your students the concept of cooperation—what it is, how it works, and why it is important. Hold a discussion in which the children share their experiences and ideas on cooperation. Examine closely such questions as when they have experienced cooperation in a positive way, in a negative way, how it feels to be part of a cooperative effort, areas in which more cooperation is needed in our lives, the difficulties we face when we try to cooperate. Help them clarify their ideas so that cooperative behavior becomes dynamic and real to them.

2. Raise children's awareness further by having them look for examples of cooperation around them—in the classroom, at play, in their families, in the larger world, in books and on TV. Have them notice, too, incidents where cooperation is needed. Discuss, draw, write about, and role-play both real and imaginary examples of cooperation. Role-play the same situation first without cooperative behavior, then with cooperation. How do the experiences differ?

3. Communicate your clear expectation of cooperative behavior when the children work and play together. Give public recognition to spontaneous acts of cooperation that you observe in the class, especially when the circumstances may have been difficult. Encourage the children to notice and give recognition to each other, perhaps by nominations for a weekly "Cooperation Award."

4. Structure learning activities to emphasize cooperation rather than competition. Replace tests and assignments in which students compete against each other with group activities in which they work together for a common goal. Encourage them to help each other with schoolwork, to assume responsibility for tutoring individuals or teaching the group skills they are working to master, to acknowledge and share their talents. Encourage the viewpoint that the class is a "team;" focus the team effort on a variety of goals from perfect scores for everyone on a spelling test to solving a major interpersonal conflict.

5. Conduct periodic learning activities whose sole objective is to explore and encourage cooperation. Such activities include group drawings, puzzles, problem-solving situations, creative or dramatic play, and many more. Make it very clear that it is not the product that will be evaluated but rather the process the group goes through. Have the children notice the ways group members facilitate cooperation, the difficulties which arise, and ways to surmount those difficulties. Discuss the experience and provide continual reinforcement of cooperative behavior. Repeat such activities of deliberate cooperation often so that new attitudes and behaviors become internalized and automatic.

6. Encourage cooperative games on the playground as a supplement or alternative to games of competition. There are many books of "New Games" available. Systematically try some of them out and evaluate with your students the positive and negative aspects of the experience.

Conclusion

The elements of safety, validation, responsibility, relevance, and cooperation form the basis for the empowering classroom in which elementary-age children can develop crucial skills and attitudes. They can learn to take themselves and others seriously. They can learn that it is their right to be aware of what is going on around them and to question the things around them which don't make sense. They can learn to think critically and to take a stand on issues that concern them. And they can learn ways to make a real difference in their lives even though they are children.

These skills and attitudes of genuine participation will, we hope, gradually become habits. Once internalized, this empowerment will continue to seek expression. Young children who have come to take their own participation for granted are far less likely to drift passively into adolescence and to sink into the apathy, powerlessness, and defiance that characterizes so many teen-agers today. They are more likely to continue refining and building their skills of participation so that, as fully empowered adults, they will be well-equipped to confront the confusion and challenge of living in today's world.

Chapter 3

Decision Making

An important area in education for participation and empowerment is that of decision making. We can provide children with an understanding of the various processes by which decisions are made in the world around them; and we can give them experience making decisions in the classroom so that they will feel comfortable with their decision-making powers as they grow up. It is our hope that children will learn to take for granted attitudes and habits of responsible decision making and carry these habits with them into adulthood.

One of our goals in teaching decision making is to encourage the citizens of tomorrow to exercise their right to a voice in their government. We are distressed that, on an average, only slightly more than half of our nation's eligible voters actually take advantage of their right to vote in local or national elections. Whether due to feelings of powerlessness and cynicism, or to a combination of more complex personal and societal factors, attitudes leading to low voter participation certainly don't emerge overnight. We find them in high school students, in junior high students, and in even younger children. Although what we do in our schools certainly can't remedy all social ills, we can do something toward reversing these patterns. And the elementary school years are not too early to begin.

The crucial decisions facing citizens in the nuclear age demand that we educate our students to think critically and to use their power effectively. The thoughts and activities in this chapter attempt to address this need by building on those suggested in the previous chapter, "The Empowering Classroom." First we present a description of the six models for decision making that have emerged from our thinking—random choice, authoritarianism, direct democracy, representative democracy, delegation of responsibility, and consensus—for teachers to use with students as they explore the processes that guide the decisions in their lives and in the world around them.

It should be noted that a large portion of the decisions that affect us are not made according to the theoretical forms of these models, however, but rather by a less formal combination of more than one of them. Following the discussion of the decision-making models are some suggested activities to help children take a closer look at decisions and how they are made. We urge teachers to use these suggestions merely as a starting point for their own classroom work and to tailor the study of decision making to the make-up of their own class.

Decision-Making Models

Random Choice. A random method of deciding is used to avoid bias, as in the selection of jurors for jury duty; or when there are no clear reasons for making one

choice over another, as in the selection of the first person to present a report in class; or when there is irreconcilable conflict, as when two people want the same thing. Decisions may be made formally by a lottery system or informally by drawing straws or flipping a coin.

Authoritarianism. In an authoritarian decision-making model, the final responsibility for all decisions rests with one person, or with a small group. The authority is not accountable to those who will be affected by the decision and may or may not consult with them.

Direct Democracy. All members of a group have an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. Every member votes. The preference of the majority becomes the decision of the group through a majority vote. Sometimes the rules are modified so that a 2/3 or 3/4 majority (or some other fraction) is required to make a decision.

Representative Democracy. Decisions are made by selected individuals from the whole group who represent the group. Decision making becomes more efficient by allowing a smaller number of group members to make decisions for the whole group. Representatives are usually elected by majority vote from a limited number of choices. Their decisions are also made by majority vote.

Delegation of Responsibility. A blend of authoritarianism and representative democracy, delegation of responsibility is a way people can turn over control of some decisions to someone else. These may be routine and non-controversial decisions that people simply don't want to be bothered with; or they may be decisions whose importance requires someone with greater expertise. The individual or group delegated to assume the responsibility is usually chosen by a less formal process than election (e.g., self-selection, appointment, hiring).

Consensus. In consensus, a decision is reached when all members of a group give their consent to a proposal. This does not mean everyone agrees completely with the proposal, only that it is sufficiently acceptable for all members to agree to support the group in choosing it. The emphasis in practicing consensus is on listening to everyone's ideas and taking all concerns into consideration in an attempt to find the decision most acceptable to the group as a whole.

Activities on Decision Making

1. Discuss *individual* decisions with the children. What things do we decide for ourselves without the help of others? What things will children be able to decide for themselves as they grow older? What things can adults decide for themselves? What decisions do children wish they could make for themselves? How do we make our decisions? Can the kinds of decisions we make be grouped into categories? In other words, help the children become aware of the individual decisions they can and can't make and some of the factors involved in making them. (The emphasis in this chapter is actually on group decision making, but it is important to "clear the air" at the start of the study by making the distinction between individual and group decisions and allowing the children to spend some time thinking about the former.)

2. Discuss *group* decisions with the children. What decisions in our lives are made by groups of people? What are some of the groups who make decisions

which affect us? What processes do groups use to make decisions? What do they do to try to make the process fair or to try to please the most people? What do people do if they don't like the decisions the group makes? When have we been part of a group which made a decision? What was the decision and how was it made? Again, this is an awareness-raising activity to start children thinking about group decisions in their lives.

3. Introduce to the children the six models of group decision making. Brainstorm their associations to each of them. When have we experienced decisions made by each of the processes? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? What situations call for the various decision-making models? Individually, with partners, or as a group, have the children make lists of as many specific decisions as they can think of which are made by each process. The following are sample responses which you might expect to hear:

   Random choice—"bucking up" to see who goes first in a game; using dice or a spinner to determine moves in a game; saying "Eenie, meenie, miney, moe"; playing Bingo, drawings in a raffle or lottery

   Authoritarianism—teachers' decisions in the classroom; parents' decisions about kids' lives; the babysitter putting you to bed; storekeepers deciding what items to have in stock and the prices to charge; dictators making rules and laws

   Direct Democracy—the class voting on something in a class meeting; grown-ups' meetings that aren't too large; class elections; family decisions in which everyone gets to vote

   Representative Democracy—student council representatives; sending someone to the library to choose a book to be read to the class; local, state, and national government representatives

   Delegation of Responsibility—hiring someone to do work for you; asking your mother to pick out a birthday present for a friend; the teacher's asking a student to take attendance, run an errand, etc.

   Consensus—planning a class party; discussing an interpersonal problem until those involved come up with a solution; family discussions to decide on chores, a weekend trip, what to watch on TV

4. As an ongoing project, have the children look for examples of group decision making in operation—in the classroom, at play, in their families, in public life, in books, and on TV. Discuss and analyze them for the decision-making models they represent (being aware that often more than one process is utilized at the same time). Create a bulletin board display to show the six models by having the children draw examples of each.

5. Create skits and role plays about each of the decision-making models. You might give a group of children a card on which a situation is suggested—e.g., "Mom, Dad, and the three kids want to go out for dinner and need to decide on a restaurant"—and let them act out the decision. The rest of the class can then identify the process used. Or, have the children role-play the same situation several times, using a different decision-making process each time, and then compare the results.

6. Apply the different decision-making processes to a real classroom decision. For example, you might offer the class an extra daily recess for a week, deciding what the group will do during this time by a different method each day. (For the authoritarian model, you might insist that they spend the time cleaning up the playground or doing some other unpopular activity so that they experience the negative extreme of authoritarian decisions.) Compare the results and the way the class members feel about them.

7. Hold regular class meetings to make decisions which are relevant to the class. Examples of the kinds of issues that might come up are where to go on a class outing, how to assign clean-up jobs, whether or not to invite a particular guest speaker to the class, what to do when someone breaks the class rules, how to schedule in various daily activities, what to do in celebration of a particular holiday, what to do to cheer up a classmate who is in the hospital, how to improve the efficiency of learning in a particularly frustrating subject, how to spend money the class has raised, what classroom pets to have, whether or not to allow snacks in class, how to help a child who is having difficulty in some area of school life, etc. Have the children observe the decision-making processes they spontaneously use, and then consciously try to select the models or combinations of models that are most appropriate for different kinds of issues. Some questions may be best decided by the authoritarian model with the teacher making a unilateral decision. Others may lend themselves easily to direct democracy, to negotiating to reach consensus, or even to random choice. The important thing is for the children to become increasingly aware of the processes and the power they have to apply them in their lives. (For further discussion of ways to encourage student decision making in the classroom, refer to the section on "Empowerment Through Responsibility" in Chapter 2, "The Empowering Classroom.")

Activities on Voting

Voting is a very important tool for group decision making. During a classroom activity involving a vote, however, even older elementary children may go through the mechanics of the voting process with only dim awareness of what they are doing. The numerical relationships involved in majorities, pluralities, ties, run-offs, margins of victory, and other voting statistics are not easy for children to grasp. The virtues of voting between a pair of choices rather than many choices may be a mystery to them. In order to help children make more sense out of the process, we would like to focus on the "numbers" part of voting in and of itself, regardless of the issue in question.

To focus on the voting process without getting sidetracked by the issue itself, you might choose a noncontroversial, nonemotional, easy-to-answer question around which to conduct a series of voting activities. The question should be both trivial and, on some level, "meaningful" to children—i.e., one on which all of them will have an opinion but whose outcome won't make any real difference to the daily life of the group. One way to determine the question is to let the class decide, because the decision-making process they go through will most certainly be fascinating and instructive. For the purposes of our activity examples here, we have chosen the question, "What is the class's favorite color?" You may, of course, substitute any "meaningfully trivial" question that seems suitable for your class. The following activities will help students to explore different ways of deciding the group's answer to this question and therefore to better understand the voting process in general.

1. Begin with the simple assignment to the group as a whole, "Find out the class's favorite color." Do not tell them how to go about it. Let them work as they choose—alone, in pairs or small groups, as a whole class. Perhaps they'll conduct a vote, or a series of individual interviews, or perhaps some children will insist that their own favorite color is the class's favorite color. Give them a time limit—till the end of the day, for example—and then let them report on their findings. Does everyone agree? How did different people go about the process of finding out? What problems did they encounter? What might be the ideal process for finding out, as nearly as possible, what the class's favorite color is? We are assuming that there will not be consensus based on an equitable decision-making process (if there is, by all means explore how it was reached!), so the goal at this point is to define the problem, "How do we go about finding out the class's favorite color?"

2. If methods other than voting appeal to some of the children, help them try them out to their satisfaction before going on to voting. For example, some children may feel that putting everyone's suggestions into a hat and then drawing one is the best way, and they may need your adult help to try out the procedure. Keep a careful record of the results of any of these methods, as well as of the group's feelings and opinions about them.

3. More than likely, voting will be the preferred method for most of the children. Help them vote on the question, "What is the class's favorite color?" in a number of different ways, trying as many possibilities as you and they can think of and analyzing variations in the results. The following are some of the voting methods you might try:

- Use different colored squares of paper as ballots, with each choice represented by a corresponding color. Each child chooses one ballot to cast, and the ballots are tallied by laying them out on the floor in a giant "bar graph" or gluing them on a large sheet of paper.
- Accept nominations, vote by a show of hands, and the color with the highest number of votes wins (even if by a margin of only one).
- Accept nominations, vote, and then have a run-off between the top two choices.
- Accept nominations, vote, eliminate the choices with the lowest votes, and then have repeated run-offs to narrow the selection until a clear winner emerges.
- Hold a "preference vote" by assigning number values to the choices in order—e.g., 5 = first choice, 4 = second, 3 = third, and so on. Students rank their choices, and the winner is the one receiving the highest total count.
- Vote by secret ballot and then by a public show of hands. Compare the results and the children's feelings during each way of voting. Did they experience peer pressure or self-consciousness when their vote was public knowledge?
- Compare votes using written ballots, a show of hands, and voice votes of "aye."
- Vote when a few children are missing from the room, and again when a large number are missing. Vote when only a very few are present. Compare the results and discuss feelings about the process.
- Rather than accepting nominations from the students, arbitrarily decide on only a few colors for the class to vote on.
- Vote first without and then with "campaign speeches" (in which supporters of a particular color speak on its virtues) and questions, and compare results.
- Try an "Add-a-Voter" activity to show how just one additional voter can make a difference. Have children come to the center of the room one at a time and say their votes, keeping a running tally to show which color is ahead at any given time.

- Compare votes in which everyone is allowed to vote, then with only certain people allowed to vote (e.g., only people whose birthdays come during the school year), and then with some people allowed to cast more votes than others.
- Compare the results when only a plurality is required to win; then when a simple majority is required; and then when 2/3 or 3/4 majorities are required. When might each method be appropriate?
- Group the class or let the children group themselves into different "constituencies," each of which elects a representative to cast its group vote.
- Explore as many other variations, combinations, and additions to these voting ideas as you can.

4. Make a visual record of the voting methods explored and the results of each as applied to the question, "What is the class's favorite color?" Bar graphs, in color, would be an especially effective way to show the results. Discuss the pros and cons of each variation on voting. How does the outcome change with different ways of voting? Which ways seem unfair and which seem most fair? Which ways satisfy the greatest number of people? Under what circumstances might different ways be appropriate? What questions do the children have about the different methods? What strong feelings came up in different voting circumstances? What are some of the "real-life" situations in which people vote, and in what ways might some of these feelings and circumstances be present in them? Which would they prefer to use in their own lives? (And, finally, based on the votes taken, what is the class's favorite color?)

5. As a final voting activity, let the class vote on an issue of real importance to them, e.g., a special treat for the group as a whole. Discuss beforehand the best way to conduct the vote and decide on a method. Vote—and let the class enjoy the treat they choose!

Simulation Activities: The Class Meeting Game and the City Game

The following pair of activities, which an older elementary class might enjoy over a period of a few weeks, were prepared by the Elections Division of the Office of the Massachusetts Secretary of State. (To obtain a free copy of these and other activity packets, write to: Office of the Secretary of State, Michael Joseph Connolly, Secretary, Elections Division, One Ashburton Place, Rm. 1705, Boston, MA 02108.)

Both the "Class Meeting Game" and the "City Game" provide an opportunity for students to learn about local government and elections, with particular attention to the decision-making and electoral processes. We are including an introduction to both of them in this chapter because of their emphasis on the ways elected groups of representatives make decisions, although they might just as well have been included in the next chapter, "Elections: Taking Part in the Political Process." (In fact, you will find in that chapter a description of the "Election Game," a companion game from the same office. All three of these simulation activities can be used alone or together, in part or in whole, to supplement a unit on decision making or a study of elections.)

The Class Meeting Game

This game consists of a complete set of materials which may be duplicated for classroom use, including the following:

Class Meeting Activity Sheet
Class Meeting Warrant
Class Voter Registration Sheet
New Voters Chart
Political Vocabulary List
Question and Answer Discussion Sheet
Additional Activities Sheet
Nomination Papers
Background Materials

In addition, there are suggestions for enrichment and background materials that you can obtain from your own community: the latest town report, a town meeting warrant, a copy of the local town map showing political boundaries, etc.

The activity itself is an open class meeting (which simulates a town meeting) in which all the children in the class have roles, either as registered voters and class meeting members, or as major characters such as moderator, clerk, selectmen, advisory board members, chairs of boards or committees who are presenting articles, etc. Each carries out her or his role in order to hold a meeting to discuss and vote on a warrant of articles.

The articles suggested include votes to change the physical arrangement of the classroom (Planning Board), votes to eliminate candy and gum in the school (Board of Health); votes to tax students for a party fund for the class (Board of Assessors); votes to start a class library on town government (Trustees of the Library); votes to increase the rewards for students who perform certain duties for the class (Personnel Committee); votes to clean up and improve the classroom and school environment (Department of Public Works); etc. In this way students experience the process of decision making according to a town meeting model and gain a sense of how town government works.

The City Game

The more extensive "City Game" is divided into four parts: The Structure of City Government, Getting Involved, From Issue to Law, and Running for Office. It includes the following materials (all of which, again, may be duplicated for classroom use):

Chart of City Government
Data Sheet for Individual Community
List of Suggested Issues
Procedural "Steps to Success"
Agenda for Council Meeting
Suggested Procedure for Conducting Public Hearings
Sample Approval/Veto Message from Mayor
Rules for Election
Voter Registration Paper
Nomination Paper and Ballot

Additional materials include "Vote—Be Counted" posters and buttons, "Your Vote Makes a Difference" background handout, election information, an evaluation sheet, and a sample press release.

In the game, the class studies the structure of their city government and simulates a city council meeting to consider issues chosen by the class. They study the decision-making process as groups of "constituents" who alert officials to

"public opinion" and exert influence through a planned strategy. After the council debates and votes on the issue, their decision is sent to the mayor for approval or veto. Finally, the students elect their governmental leaders on their first-hand knowledge of the performance of the candidates in dealing with issues.

Chapter 4

Elections: Taking Part in the Political Process

Our educational efforts to prepare children to participate fully in their world must include the experience of empowerment in the classroom. In the preceding chapters on "The Empowering Classroom" and "Decision Making," we looked at ways to provide children with the experiences of safety, validation, responsibility, relevance, and cooperation in the day-to-day world of classroom life, and to help them understand different ways groups make decisions. In working with children to create this kind of learning environment, we hope to ground them securely in some of the most important skills and attitudes they will need as they move through adolescence and into the challenges of adulthood in our society.

The study of the electoral process must be integrated into such a context. The concepts we invite our students to examine must be meaningful to them in terms of their present interests and levels of understanding. Children, after all, do not vote. The results of an election are rarely perceived by them as making any real difference in their lives. How, then, can we teach about elections—one of the most basic ways citizens in a democracy exercise their powers of participation and decision making—in a way that supports our most fundamental goals of education for empowerment?

In order to answer this question, we might first take a look at some of the developmental factors that influence children's understanding, at different ages, of the electoral process. What is it about elections that interests children? What perceptions and wonderings are already present in their minds? What are their related questions, curiosities, concerns, and ideas? How can we best structure for them an age-appropriate acquaintance with the election process?

Developmental Factors

Children perceive all adults as powerful. Young children attribute great power to their parents and to other adults in their lives. Age itself is identified as a great virtue—up to a point. This respect for the authority and wisdom of adults provides the necessary security within which it is safe for children to explore and learn. If adults in their positions of power are perceived as "out of control" or "evil," the child's basic security can be shaken. The emotional consequences of this loss of trust may be severe.

In order to reconcile confusing conflicts they observe in the world around them (as well as to gain control of their own impulses), children have a tendency to categorize people into "good-bad" and "us-them" dichotomies. Politicians, even more than more familiar adults, may be perceived as leaders and "good guys"

simply because of their status in the public eye. If a particular politician, or politics in general, is labeled as "bad" by the adults on whom they depend, children will certainly internalize this attitude. Even without any direct input from adults, children may apply this polarized thinking to what they learn about political candidates. They may be unable as yet to explore comfortably the vast "gray" area that constitutes most of politics.

Perhaps it is only by dismissing the negatively viewed candidate as the "bad guy" that children can tolerate the presence of apparent conflicts between otherwise viable alternatives. We may, in fact, accept many of these perceptions as developmentally appropriate to the children we teach. On the other hand, we are continually striving to help children expand their world view, to develop more complex thinking, to give them tools for exploring ambiguity and arriving at their own conclusions. For this reason, it is wise not to dwell with young children on "dirty politics" or questions of corruption, but rather to encourage them to listen to and respect the variety of opinions around them. We hope that they will be able to see all the candidates and their supporters as complex human beings who happen to disagree in a healthy way about important issues.

Children also hold strong and gradually developing views on fairness. Their perceptions of fairness in an election may not coincide at all with the principle of majority (or plurality) rule. Many children, for example, hold the egocentric conviction that it is basically unfair if their own wishes don't determine the results of a vote. They may also feel that it is somehow "cheating" to vote for oneself. The evidence of classroom voting indicates that the concept of "one person, one vote" can be an elusive one for young children who, in good faith, sometimes raise their hands more than once per tally.

Older children may understand the mechanics of voting, but may be concerned with personal issues of fairness and justice. They may consider it unfair, for example, that they don't have the right to vote. As they begin to understand issues of equality of opportunity, they can grapple with some of the more complex questions of fairness within the political process—e.g., the fact that some candidates have more money than others to spend on their campaigns. By listening carefully to the children we teach, we can determine the ways their views on fairness do or do not coincide with the drama of the elections. We can let them know that we, too, care about fairness. We can accept their feelings and, at the same time, help them recognize the complicated notion that justice is not absolute.

Children also often lack the ability to deal accurately with large numbers, percentages, and other statistical concepts. They first understand quantitative relationships through their own concrete experiences. A heavy reliance on manipulative materials marks their early mathematical learning. When conducting a class vote with very young children, for example, it may be useful to give each child the choice of different colored squares of paper as ballots and to lay the ballots side by side on the floor (in a giant bar graph) to determine which choice received the most votes. Such concrete representations of votes and graphs, as well as charts, surveys, estimation and counting activities, and visualizations of large numbers can help children move toward an understanding of the mathematical elements in group choices and preferences. But these conceptual skills develop slowly, and we should not expect most early elementary students to demonstrate cognitive mastery of them.

Because children are also "collectors"—they enjoy gathering pieces of information and learning and quoting the "facts" about a topic—the study of an election can provide satisfying opportunities for them to gather data, examine relationships within the data, practice categorizing and comparing, and directly experience numbers and statistics in a meaningful way. As they gain control of mathematical

and symbolic concepts, they can also come to understand the power of large-scale collective action within the democratic process.

Another area of confusion for children is the relationship among the various geographical and political divisions in the world around them. It is not until the middle elementary years that they begin to understand the relationships between their street, neighborhood, town, county, state, and country—all of which play some role in the structure of our government. At about third grade, children become intrigued by this concept of inclusion within a series of units of increasing size. For younger children, it is confusing to think that one can live both in Buffalo and in New York simultaneously. Even the word "country" to a child usually means the place where there are lots of trees and mountains, as opposed to a politically sovereign nation. Again, we must listen carefully and match our input to the child's level of understanding so that the knowledge they gain is empowering rather than mystifying.

The issues that concern young children are personal and concrete. Children strive to comprehend new things in terms of what they already know. The election issues that will be meaningful to them are those that can be related to their own life experience in some way. Their preferences for one candidate over another will almost certainly reflect their parents' views rather than their own critical examination of the issues. This is perfectly appropriate—children are not voters precisely because they lack the experience on which to base such judgments.

Older elementary students become especially sensitive to the differences they perceive around them. When their peers disagree, or when their parents and teachers support different candidates, children may find themselves in an uncomfortable spot. It is therefore very important that we respect the full range of views on issues that may come up in a study of elections.

As we help children think about the election process, we are also supporting their developing sense of responsibility toward social problems and their solutions. This does not mean that we don't acknowledge sympathetically any feelings of disempowerment or cynicism children may have; nor does it mean that we are laying on their shoulders our adult concerns and responsibilities. It does mean that we are willing to include them now, at the level that is comfortable and appropriate for their stage of development, in the exciting process of becoming an aware and responsible participant in our democratic system.

What follows is a list of suggestions and activities for teaching about elections in the elementary grades. It does not introduce any political content, but rather is based on the information and questions children themselves bring to the class. It can be adapted to the developmental level of a kindergarten class or used in a more sophisticated form with sixth graders. Although this material was prepared during the 1984 election season, it applies to any election, from local to national, from school committee to President. Please feel free to use these suggestions in whatever way is appropriate both to your class and to the resources you find in the political arena around you.

At the end of this chapter you will find a selected bibliography of children's books on the election process, varying in difficulty from very easy picture books all the way up to those written at a high-school reading level. They can be read aloud to the class when there is a clear need for information about a particular area; or they can be read by individual students or used as resource material in independent research projects. You will certainly want to supplement this list with materials you find in your own school and local library.

Activities on Elections

Introductory Activities

1. Begin with a brainstorming session in which children can put forth what they already know about the upcoming election and elections in general. You might open with the question, "What important event is going to take place on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November?" or "What do you know about elections?" Accept any ideas that come out, asking clarifying questions and making connections between the children's responses. Encourage them to share any words, associations, ideas, thoughts, or questions that the topic brings to mind. The goal is to generate as much material as possible from the children's own experience. It isn't time yet to analyze or evaluate.

2. Start a vocabulary list of election words that the children mention. You might write the words on a large sheet of newsprint to post somewhere in the room, or write each word clearly on an index card and then post the index cards where they can be viewed. This list can grow organically as election discussions continue, with all the initial entries coming spontaneously from the children. Later the teacher can add words to the list and use it as the basis for a variety of activities—word games and puzzles; activities on spelling, definitions, origins, and related vocabulary words; creative writing and research project; etc.

3. As homework, encourage the children to raise the subject of elections with their families and friends outside of school to see what new information they can bring back to the group. This isn't a formal interview activity, but rather a chance to extend the brainstorming a little further. Follow this assignment with a second brainstorming session in which you ask, "What else can you think of about elections? Did you think of anything to add to what we've already said? Did you find out anything new from talking to your family?" Again, the goal is simply to let the children express whatever they can on the topic.

4. Begin a list of questions that emerge from the discussions—things people aren't sure of, points of disagreement, things to learn more about. You can list these on a sheet of newsprint or on individual cards and post them somewhere in the room. As new information and possible answers come up, refer back to the questions; keep adding to them; have interested individuals or small groups hunt for answers; devote a thoughtful discussion to the more provocative of the questions. (Resist the temptation to provide answers too soon. It can be far more educational for children to hold onto unanswered questions over a period of time, allowing for speculation, hypothesis, intellectual detective work, and the thrill of finally putting pieces of information together to satisfy curiosity.)

Newspaper and Magazine Articles

5. After the children have had sufficient opportunity to share the ideas and information they already have in their heads, suggest that they look for newspaper and magazine articles about the elections to bring in to the group. (This will probably start to happen before you suggest it, at which time you can simply acknowledge that newspapers and magazines are good sources of information and encourage everyone to bring in interesting articles.)

6. Continue holding regular sharing times and discussions of the ongoing information the children are bringing in. It is important, however, that the new ideas the children share with the group come from their own minds rather than being simply read aloud at length from an article that is over their heads. One way to facilitate this process is to let them hold up and show the article, especially if there is a picture, and to tell what publication it came from and, in a sentence, what it is about. If they clearly have more than a summary sentence to say about it, they should be encouraged to do so—as long as they aren't simply reading it without any real understanding. Add any new vocabulary words, questions, and ideas to the growing body of knowledge the class is amassing.

7. Find some way to save, organize, and make available the articles and printed information the children bring in. A changing bulletin board display is one way to make the material visible and available for more leisurely individual examination. As new articles come in, they can replace earlier contributions, and the old articles can be saved in a scrapbook or catalogued in file folders, which are kept in an easily accessible place. Let the children participate as fully as possible in the design of the bulletin board and scrapbook and in the categorizing system for the files; and if the organization needs to be changed periodically, so much the better.

8. Encourage the children to look at the collected articles on their own during the school day. Encourage them to read or even simply skim any that interest them. Ask leading questions. Direct their attention to articles that hold the key to some point of confusion or curiosity. Don't demand or even expect thorough reading for full comprehension—such a task might well be overwhelming even to more mature readers—but trust that relevant and intriguing ideas will sift out gradually as the children explore the material in their own way. When children discover something interesting from their reading, have them share it with the group.

Organizing the Information

9. After several discussions and sharing sessions, when the children themselves have generated a substantial amount of information and questions, begin focusing on ways to organize what they are learning so that it "makes sense." You may need, for example, to sort it into such categories as information about the presidential election; information about other current political races; information about other elections in the past; and information about elections in general. Different groups of children may come up with entirely different ranges of questions and categories of information, and in all cases the teacher's approach should follow the children's lead. You might wish to raise some of the following questions fairly early in the discussions: What is an election? Why do we have them? Who gets to vote in elections? etc. As more specific information emerges, you might ask the following: What are the offices people are running for? Who are the candidates for these offices? Why do they want these jobs? Who currently holds these offices? What are the political parties represented? etc.

10. As information about the lengthy process of campaigning for the presidency emerges, construct a timeline and display it in the classroom. One way to do this is to tie a long string across the room like a clothesline; at regular intervals on the string, attach colored index cards labeled to represent months. Let the

children use white index cards to represent events in the presidential election process. On each card, one event is listed—e.g., "February 1983: New Hampshire Primary"; "July 1984: Democratic Convention"—with a colorful drawing to illustrate it. The event cards are then attached to the string at the appropriate months, gradually accumulating until the timeline represents the entire process from the candidates' first decision to run, through the election, to the presidential inauguration in January. (Since young children do not have a well-developed sense of time, you may wish to relate each event to something they can remember in their own lives—"Let's see, this card represents last February; that's when it was cold and snowy, and Mr. Nelson came to teach kindergarten because Ms. Perry left to have her baby. This one is for June, when school ended for summer vacation. . . .")

The Historical Context

11. If references appear regularly to "historical" events from elections in the past, seek books and other resources that can provide information and a point of view on the subject. You can read these aloud to the class, or make them available for individual use. For example, older elementary students may express an interest in the lowering of the voting age to 18; at this time it might be most appropriate to engage them in a look at the history of enfranchisement in the United States. Who was originally empowered to vote? How did the right to vote become extended to include unpropertied citizens, native Americans, African Americans, women, 18-year-olds, others?

Interviews and Polls

12. Have the children generate their own sets of questions about the election that they would like to ask a particular group, and then let them interview members of this group. They might interview their parents, their relatives, their older friends, or the teachers in the school. Questions might include the following: What do you know about the upcoming election? Which candidate do you support and why? Are you registered in a political party? Are you a registered voter? What is the most important issue for you in this election and why? Share and discuss the results of the interviews.

13. Have the children conduct a public opinion survey or poll (as opposed to the less formal interview which may ask questions of only a single other person). Help them generate a specific question to ask a large number of members of a group—e.g., polling high school students on what they think the voting age should be; asking parents whether they plan to vote and why; questioning younger children about their familiarity with the presidential candidates' names, asking both women and men how they feel about a woman being president; etc.

14. Make graphs of the results of the children's polls and surveys. Discuss people's reasons for the responses they gave. How accurate are these polls in determining how a larger number of people might feel? Who was in the sample and how were they chosen? What are random samplings and representative samplings within a given group? Look critically at the survey question itself for ways in which the nature of the question may distort the information received.

15. Collect clippings of public opinion polls that appear in the newspapers. Who conducts them and how are they conducted? Have the children ask the same

questions of a sampling of people in their own school and neighborhood. How do the results compare? How might any differences be accounted for? What effect do polls have on people's opinions and on the outcome of the elections?

The Role of the Media

16. Help your students consider the role of the media in an election. Count the number of times the name of a particular candidate appears on the front page of a newspaper. Compare the number over a period of days or weeks; compare the number among different newspapers; compare it for different candidates. What are the patterns and how might they be explained? Do these patterns seem fair?

17. Examine examples of paid political advertisements in the newspaper. How do these differ from articles, from editorials? What methods of persuasion do the candidates use to get their messages across? Compare the newspaper ads to the fliers and brochures distributed by the candidates, as well as to their billboard posters. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each of these forms?

18. Have your students design an effective graphic advertisement for a candidate of their choice; or for an imaginary candidate—either of their own creation or from familiar fiction, fantasy, or folklore ("Miss Piggy for the City Council!"); or for themselves or a friend. Encourage them to make use of real techniques of persuasion in order to communicate the superiority of their candidate.

19. For homework, have the children watch for paid political advertisements on TV and analyze them for methods of persuasion. A TV spot is expensive and very brief—often no more than fifteen seconds. How does a candidate make the most effective use of this time? How are TV spots more effective than newspaper ads, fliers, or billboard posters? How are they less effective? What isn't said in a TV spot? What is misleading? What side of the candidate might the spot not show? Is this the best way to learn about a candidate?

20. Have the students prepare their own short TV messages in which they role-play the endorsers of the candidates or the candidates themselves. Present these "commercials" before the class and analyze them for effectiveness. Let the children have repeated tries at using each second of time in the most powerful way. Videotape the presentations, if possible.

The Candidates and the Campaign

21. Collect copies of the campaign literature distributed by the different candidates for a particular office. Compare the candidates as people—age, childhood background, family life, education, career, other interests. Compare them as candidates—the issues they emphasize, their positions, the voters they appeal to, their qualifications.

22. Compare the campaign fliers and brochures of the different candidates simply for their effectiveness at getting their messages across. What advertising techniques do they use? What catches the eye first? What is most attractive in the design of the literature? How does it appeal to the reader's emotions? What impression of the candidates does the literature try to convey?

23. Make a chart to compare the campaign issues as reflected in the candidates' statements in the newspapers, on TV, and in their literature. A grid format works well when comparing more than two candidates. Names can be placed across the top, issues down the left side, and the resulting blocks filled in with a summary of the position statements. Be sure to "verify" the positions by finding direct quotes attributed to the candidates; discuss any statements that might be interpreted in more than one way. What are the best sources of information about a candidate? How can we be most sure of accurately getting the candidate's position on an issue?

24. When the class has a fairly good understanding of some of the candidates and their campaign issues, try this challenge. Choose several quotes from the candidates' speeches, statements, and literature; have the children try to identify who said each one. In what ways are the candidates' statements similar or dramatically different; direct or evasive; ambiguous or clear?

25. Use role-play as a way for children to understand the candidates and explore differences among them. Try placing the names of candidates on chairs and ask individual children to sit in the chairs and assume the roles of those candidates in a debate. You can be the moderator and ask questions about the issues in the election, or questioning can be open to the "audience" of other students in the class. What do they know about the candidates? Can they discuss specific issues in the campaign? Try giving them more information, or assignments to find out specific information, or encourage them to "ad-lib" what they think their candidate might say based on what they already know about him or her. Offer all the children the opportunity to take on any of the candidates' roles. Repeat this exercise at several points in your election study; you may find it a good way to assess what your students are internalizing about the candidates, the issues, and the process itself.

Letter Writing

26. Practice letter-writing skills around various areas of the election. The teacher can do the actual writing for very young children, but they can have input—dictating all or part of the letter, or simply participating in a discussion about what the letter will say and watching as it is composed. Older students can write their own letters, individually or in small groups. When replies come in, share them with the class and discuss them. Make a bulletin board display or scrapbook of the class election correspondence.

27. In addition to writing to campaign headquarters for literature on the various candidates, write to the candidates themselves with specific questions. Students might choose an issue of personal concern to them and ask if it has been identified as a campaign issue—e.g., the condition of a neighborhood playground. If the class is lucky enough to get a personal reply, evaluate the response. How does receiving a personal letter influence your feelings about the candidate? How does the content of the reply affect your feelings? What is the role of the "personal touch" in campaigning?

28. Write letters to other sources of information. Write to officials in public office asking about their jobs. Write letters to invite guest speakers to the classroom. Write letters to the editor of the newspaper with students' questions or comments. Write to the President; to the League of Women Voters; to the state

Voter Information Office; to local registrars of voters or city or town clerks; to people in the community who might be "experts" on election topics of interest; to public interest groups; to anyone who might be a direct source of information. Discuss and save the replies you get. (They are also a superb basis for language arts lessons on letter writing—relevant, real-life examples of different letter formats and styles.)

Guest Speakers

29. Invite guest speakers into your classroom to give presentations or answer questions on their topics of expertise. Children can ask their parents for suggestions of guests with whom they may have personal contacts. Almost anyone involved in the political system is appropriate. Invite local candidates for school committee, city council, the state legislature, even national office (you never know who might feel that a school appearance would be a good campaign stop!). Invite campaign workers, people who work on voter registration or at the polling place on election day, anyone who has run for office of any kind, members of the community who know about some aspect of the political process. Invite teachers, parents, or neighbors who support different candidates so the children can ask questions about why they feel the way they do. Be sure to present a balanced picture—for example, if you invite a Democratic party worker, also invite a Republican, and a minority party representative if possible. Be careful not to propagandize if you share any of your own political views.

30. Brainstorm and keep an ongoing list of questions to ask guest speakers. Encourage the children to add to the list as they go along. Plan which questions are most appropriate for which guests and rehearse a "press conference" beforehand. Ask the same questions of a number of different guests and compare their responses.

31. Follow up any visit from a guest speaker with some way of commemorating it—perhaps a short article about the visit for the school newspaper; or an illustrated story about the visit to post for all to read; or a bound and illustrated book, written by a group of children, to keep in the class library. (Be sure to write thank-you letters to all guest speakers, either from individual students or from the class as a whole.)

Field Trips

32. Extend the children's direct experience with the election process through field trips. (Class trips can incorporate a number of related activities, such as letter writing, interviewing, phone calls, and research.) Possible places to visit might include the following: local campaign headquarters (visit more than one); voter registration offices; the office of a current elected official; a local polling place. In some communities, public schools are used as polling places. If your school is one of these, try to arrange for your students to observe the voting (quietly and from a distance) on election day and to examine the inside of a voting booth and a sample ballot.

33. If your school is in an urban or semiurban area, take your class to visit several surrounding neighborhoods. This can be the basis for a number of observations and activities. Count the ads, posters, buttons, bumper stickers, etc. that you

see for different candidates. Make graphs and compare the results for different neighborhoods. How do you explain any differences? Interview people in different neighborhoods about the election. Are they registered voters? Do they plan to register? Do they plan to vote? If not, why not? Which candidates do they prefer and why? Which local issues are most important to them? which national issues?

Before and After Election Day

34. The day before the election, be sure to review with your class what is going to take place the next day. Have them be particularly aware of last-minute political activity in the neighborhood. Open the discussion to whatever thoughts they may have at this time: How many years will it be before you have the right to vote? Whom do you know who will be voting? Who won't be voting, and why? Who do you think will win, and why? What will be their margin of victory? What do you think were the most important things that happened in the campaign? Did any of the candidates make a mistake? Did any of them do anything outstanding? What are your last-minute impressions of each candidate—what do you like best and least about them? etc.

35. On election day, be sure to speculate with the class about what is happening. If at all possible, make a trip into the outside world to observe the activity firsthand. In what ways are people's everyday lives changed because this is voting day? What are your parents doing differently today? What about friends, relatives, neighbors? Observe a local polling place from a convenient distance. What is going on? What is the meaning of the last-minute campaigning? etc.

36. On the day after the election, discuss the results and the children's ideas and feelings about them. How do you think the winner feels? the loser? What do you think each of them will be doing now? What are the advantages and disadvantages of winning? of losing? Read parts of the victory and concession speeches. How do you feel now about what they are saying? Review the clippings collected during the campaign. What new thoughts do you have from this vantage point? Look back on the campaign promises. Watch what those elected do in the future and compare it to their promises. Watch the actions of those who didn't get elected, too. How are they continuing to work in other ways to make a difference? Write letters of congratulation or consolation. (And . . . leave it all behind and go on to something new!)

Extending the Election Study

37. Make careful note of the students' questions and interests throughout the entire election study. Many of them can form the basis for individual and small-group projects that incorporate a variety of creative techniques and research skills. Encourage the children to seek answers to their questions by using classroom reference materials, the school or public library, by interviewing "experts" around them, or by writing for information. The results of their research can be presented to others in many exciting ways—a meticulously executed written report; an illustrated story book; a drawing, cartoon, or comic strip; an oral presentation complete with visual aids; a skit, puppet show, or dramatization; a shoebox diorama; an original poem or song; charts, graphs or posters; a tape recording, with or without accompanying visuals; even a videotape, slide show, or super-8 movie.

38. Enlist the help of others to expand children's interests around the election into major projects. Work with the art teacher on creative ways for children to express what they are learning—banners, puppets, posters, models of a polling place, "flip books" or quick cartooning techniques to depict an aspect of a political campaign. Work with the music teacher to research folk songs that reflect the particular social issues of a past campaign, to help your students put their own original election songs to music, or to create sound tracks for their presentations. Collaborate with the drama teacher on role-plays, skits, or a full scale play about an election campaign (see "More Extensive Projects" below). Draw on parents and other members of the community as resources.

More Extensive Projects

A Class Play for the Whole School

1. Older elementary students may enjoy presenting what they have learned about elections in the form of a class play to put on before the whole school. As much as possible, the children themselves should research the information and write the script, brainstorming the characters, dramatic situations, and details to include as they go along. Costumes and props, lighting and music, are also elements to consider using; but the "professional" level of the production need be determined only by the age and enthusiasm of the participants and the resources available.

2. A good way to begin is to decide together on setting, characters, and situation. Invent a pair of candidates for a particular office—people and office can be realistic or fanciful—and then carefully work out the sequence of steps in the campaign. You might start with a scene of each candidate conversing with someone in her or his private life about deciding to run for office, and then follow each one through the process of filing petitions, nomination (if it applies), campaigning, giving speeches, appearing on TV, giving a press conference, meeting the public, perhaps confronting a controversial situation or issue, etc. Treat each step in the sequence as a dramatic scene and "flesh it out" with colorful details. Carry the process right up to voting day.

3. Let the student actors selected to play the parts come up with their own lines in each scene. If they "rehearse" many times, they can become comfortable with the situations; it may be unnecessary for them to memorize most of what they say. Both the main themes and the supporting details can evolve gradually as the actors try out different ways of exploring each scene; and the teacher can serve as scribe, taking notes on what works best for the students and helping them tie it together.

4. A memorable dramatic ending for the play might be the voting itself—involving the audience as the electorate, voting for the candidate of their choice after they view the play. Students can hand out "ballots" to the members of the audience before they leave the auditorium with instructions to mark them and deposit them in "ballot boxes" positioned somewhere in the school, or a "polling place" with "voting booths" can be set up in a convenient location. The votes can be counted by the class that put on the program and the results announced at the end of the school day—perhaps with a speech by the victor.

5. Whatever form such a production takes, it should be written up and photographed for the local newspaper. Empowering student efforts deserve recognition!

Vote and Be Counted: The Election Game

6. Another major project your class can undertake is the "Election Game," prepared by the Elections Division of the office of the Massachusetts Secretary of State. It is similar in structure to the "Class Meeting Game" and the "City Game," both of which are discussed in the section "Simulation Activities" in chapter 3, "Decision Making." (To obtain a free copy of these activity packets, write to: Office of the Secretary of State, Michael Joseph Connolly, Secretary, Elections Division, One Ashburton Place, Rm. 1705, Boston, MA 02108.)

7. The "Election Game" consists of a complete set of materials (all of which may be duplicated for classroom use) for a class of up to 25 students, including the following:

   25 "Election Game" fliers (ballots)
   1 teacher's guide
   1 Registration and Voting List
   1 Official Nomination Paper
   1 VOTE Poster
   2 cards of VOTE buttons
   1 Voting Survey
   1 "Our New Voters" poster
   1 Certificate of Registration

   In addition, two duplicating masters, "Registering to Vote in Our Community" and "Community Survey," may be ordered from the Elections Division for use with this activity.

8. Originally designed in 1980 to encourage students in grades four through seven to get involved in the November election, the project is divided into two parts: the "Election Game" and the "Community Survey." Children study the mechanics of an election, including what it means to register and what it means to vote. After conducting a mock election in their class, students turn their attention to a community survey in their own town to discover why people vote—and why they don't vote.

9. The final stage in the project is one of "real-life" involvement for students. They have the opportunity to go into their own community and to zero in on potential voters, sharing with them the information about registration acquired in class and urging them to participate in the upcoming election. This process consists of conducting a survey, passing on voter registration information, making follow-up phone calls, and recording on an eye-catching poster their successes in registering new voters.

10. We discovered this very powerful teaching tool quite by accident, by calling a 1-800 number advertised as "Voter Information" on the back of a city bus. The "Election Game" and the related resources prepared by the Massachusetts Secretary of State may or may not be unique examples of educational services provided by the state government. We urge you to investigate the resources available to you in your own state by contacting the appropriate governmental

offices. Empowering education for the citizens of tomorrow is the concern of a great many people. As teachers, we need to find them and make good use of what they have to offer. (Keep in mind, of course, that any materials we find will reflect the viewpoint of their sponsors and authors, and that our responsibility as teachers is to present a balanced picture and not to propagandize.)

Conclusion

It is not essential for elementary-age children to have a real understanding of the workings of the electoral process in our country. But it *is* essential that they begin to become aware of what participatory government is all about. Even more important, they need our help in experiencing themselves as empowered participants within the very real roles they occupy in their environment—be it their classrooms, peer groups, families, or expanding social positions. By starting with their own level of knowledge and interest in the process of elections, we hope to communicate to children that we all do have a voice and a vote, that the countless decisions thatgo into determining the way our world "happens" to be are not beyond our influence, and that they, too, are valued and potentially powerful members of the world of the future.

Selected Bibliography of Books for Young People on the Election Process*

Archer, Jules. *Winners and Losers: How Elections Work in America.* New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1984.**

Comprehensive resource; encourages young people to get involved in the political process. Recent US interference in foreign elections is mentioned in the interesting chapter "How Other Countries Choose Their Leaders." The Soviet section of this book is outdated due to the rapid pace of change in the USSR. Gr. 5–12.

Corbin, Carole Lynn. *The Right to Vote.* New York: Watts, 1985.

Documents the history of the right to vote in America, including the struggles of African Americans, women, and those under twenty-one. Gr. 5 and up.

Fradin, Dennis. *Voting and Elections.* Chicago: Children's Press, 1985.

Good overview of the election process for younger students. Gr. K–4.

Hewett, Joan (photographs by Richard Hewett). *Getting Elected: Diary of a Campaign.* New York: Lodestar/Dutton, 1989.**

Clear and inspiring account of the successful campaign of Gloria Molina, a Mexican-American woman, for a Los Angeles City Council seat. Gr. 3–6.

* It is difficult to find nonsexist or multiethnic contexts in books on this subject. When using some of the references listed the teacher will need to provide the appropriate contexts.
**Highly recommended

Bibliography revised 1991 by Jackie Shonerd.

Raber, Thomas R. *Election Night*. Minneapolis: Lerner, 1988.

Describes elections, how they work, and how one vote has sometimes made a difference. Gr. 4–8.

Raber, Thomas R. *Presidential Campaign*. Minneapolis: Lerner, 1988.

Explains what the president does and the history of campaigns. Gr. 4–8.

Samuels, Cynthia K. *It's a Free Country!: A Young Person's Guide to Politics and Elections*. New York: Atheneum, 1988.**

How individuals, including women and people of color, have made a difference through politics. Explains how voter accountability works via the story of LBJ and the Vietnam War, and suggests ways young people can participate in campaigns and elections. Excellent glossary. Gr. 4–9.

The Social Studies School Service general catalog of audiovisual resources and books lists six pages of annotated resources on elections. This excellent catalog is available free by calling 800–421–4246 or writing to: Social Studies School Service, 10200 Jefferson Blvd., Rm. 1811, Culver City, CA 90232–0802.

Chapter 5

Making a Difference

In this book we have tried to look with elementary age children at the ways people can take part in the world around them. We have focused their attention on the many forms participation can take and the value of each of them. We have considered classroom structures and activities that give children a heightened sense of their own worth and lead to feelings of empowerment. We have explored different ways groups can make decisions and looked closely at the election process. Finally, we would like to find ways to give children the direct experience of acting to make a real difference in the world beyond the home and classroom.

In this chapter, "Making a Difference," we will help children extend their growing awareness of themselves as participants to include taking part in actions to make the world a better place. These actions may range from something as simple as writing a letter of endorsement, to organizing to clean up a local playground, to singing or giving a performance at a nursing home, to carrying out a major fund-raising project for a public service organization of their choice, or to the "Community Survey" and voter registration project included in the "Election Game" activity in the preceding chapter. There is some way that even young children can experience themselves as significant contributors to the improvement of the world, an attitude which we hope they will continue to exercise and build on as they grow up.

It is important to emphasize that we are most decidedly *not* trying in this way to draw children into our own adult concerns and actions. It is never appropriate for teachers to use the classroom as a forum for their own political views nor to use their students as agents for carrying out their personal choices for action. The rationale for the activities in this chapter is simply to underscore the children's own sense of their ability to make age-appropriate decisions and contributions in areas which matter to them and to others. As with the other activities in this book, the starting point should be the children's own ideas and experiences. The teacher's role is to help children explore and expand their ideas and, finally, to integrate the new learning into their growing awareness of themselves as valuable, empowered participants in their world.

Activities on Making a Difference

1. Begin with a brainstorming discussion in which children are invited to think of areas for improvement in the world and possible ways to address the problems. Their ideas may be as general as "keeping bad guys from hurting anyone" or as specific as "having pizza offered more often as a school lunch." Write all ideas on large sheets of paper to post and refer to later. Avoid any judgments

or analytical discussion of the ideas that come up, but rather ask clarifying questions—"Can you think of any other ways the problem of pollution might be dealt with?"—and draw connections among various ideas. The goal at this point is simply to generate as long a list as possible of problems and the ways in which they might be solved.

2. Extend the brainstorming into a homework assignment in which the children raise the subject of problems and possible solutions with their families and friends. Reopen the discussion by asking such questions as, "Have you thought of any other things that might be made better?" or "Did any new ideas come up when you talked to your family about problems they see in the world?" Add new ideas to the list.

3. After the class has produced a long list and exhausted their ideas, discuss and evaluate what has come up with an eye toward choosing one of the problems for a class "making a difference" project. The children may need your help in restating some of their ideas in a more meaningful form and in evaluating the implications of the problems they have defined. Get a broad sense of where the greatest emotional energy lies—for many children, the plight of baby seals or whales or other endangered species strikes a deeply sympathetic chord; for others, a local issue such as the construction of a memorial or monument is of greatest interest. At any rate, if you are aware of the areas that seem to mean the most to your students, then you can help them zero in and explore them more fully.

4. Again, have the children talk with friends and family about their choice of a "making a difference" project. New ideas for areas to look at and ways to approach them may come up, so don't rush the process. Parents and friends may belong to organizations that would appreciate the involvement of children. It makes sense to find out about those existing connections, because they can be helpful when it comes to really making a difference. Use your judgment to help the children come up with some realistic possibilities for involvement and ways to implement them. Draw their attention to the efforts of organizations whose purpose is to address the problems the class is most interested in. Look especially at organizations with branches in your area; the project will be more meaningful if it isn't all a "long distance" effort.

5. When you have a fairly specific and realistic list, the class should decide on the problem on which they want to make a difference and on the particular action they want to take. The first step is deciding on how to decide—will it be by the vote of a simple majority, or will they try to reach consensus by hashing out any conflicts and finding ways to compromise? Give them help where they need it, but let them go through the process on their own so that they will really feel that the decision and the project belong to them.

6. Once an area of concern is decided on, direct the children's efforts toward thoroughly researching the problem and possible actions. A number of approaches are possible, depending on the scope of the issue. If the problem resides in the school or the immediate community, it will probably be possible to find out the individuals directly in charge, and then to contact them either in person or by letter. Asking relevant questions, presenting a proposal for change, negotiating solutions, and even writing letters to the local newspaper on the subject are all processes the children can participate in and find empowering.

7. If the problem your class chooses to address has a broader base, then their approach will be different. Should they choose to focus on something like hunger among children elsewhere in the world, for example, then find out what various groups and organizations are trying to do about it. Write to Oxfam, America; to UNICEF; to the Red Cross; to a local church or synagogue that might be working on the same issue. Invite representatives from the organizations to speak to the class about what they are doing and about ways the children might participate. Their efforts might be as direct as going into the office to help stuff envelopes for a mailing, or as general as raising money and sending off a check in the mail. Examine the possibilities carefully so that the children can choose those which will be most meaningful and enjoyable to them.

8. If doing something directly, rather than raising money, is a possibility, you will want to help plan and structure the appropriate field trips and activities (both in-school and out). It may be possible for the children to perform such services as doing office tasks; collecting clothing, toys or food for disadvantaged people; visiting a nursing home to give a choral performance; making and sending birthday cards or letters to people in hospitals or prisons; operating a water station during a local road race; planting a garden to beautify a community "eyesore"; cleaning up or repairing a local playground; or any of a number of other possibilities. What is available for your class to do will depend, of course, on your particular resources, restrictions, and circumstances; but the experience of contributing directly to a cause through some action will certainly be educational and empowering to your students.

9. It is even more likely that you will find a money-raising project to be the most significant way your class can make a difference. What the children choose to do in order to raise funds should be the focus of a patient, thoughtful discussion and decision-making process. Help them come up with ideas for services they can perform or items they can make and sell. They may find it hard to believe, for example, that strangers might want to buy original greeting cards the class makes, so you will want to help them recognize the talent in the group. The following money-raising projects which elementary school students can do are offered either as suggestions or as jumping-off points for your own thinking:

   - hold a bake sale or car wash
   - make, print, and sell original calendars
   - make, print, and sell original greeting cards
   - make and sell an original quilt
   - compile and sell an original, illustrated cookbook
   - put on a play, concert, or other performance
   - hold a class "fair" or yard sale
   - sell chances to a raffle
   - conduct and sell tickets to a "mini-Olympics"
   - organize a race or "walk-a-thon"
   - organize a baby-sitting brigade or weekend playgroup
   - learn and then teach, for a fee, a craft such as batik, tie-dye, macrame, simple weaving, calligraphy, cartooning; or sell the products of the above crafts

10. In carrying out whatever project the class decides on, let the children themselves assume major responsibility for all decisions and areas of effort. Give the supervision and guidance they need, but allow leeway also for mistakes and explorations that may be even more instructive than "answers" you might provide. The experience of organizing and acting to make a real difference can be empowering for them even if they do not raise a large sum of money.

11. When the money has been raised, let the children count it and wrap the coins in paper rolls. Then take a class trip to a local bank to turn it in for a cashier's check or money order. If possible, invite a representative from the benefiting organization to come to your class for a ceremony in which the students present the check. If a personal visit isn't possible, send the money off with a letter written by the students themselves.

12. No matter what problem situation your students identify and what action they choose to take to make a difference, be sure to give public recognition to their efforts. Look for an opportunity to have someone in a position of importance (the Superintendent of Schools, for example) cite them publicly for what they have done. Document the project with photographs. Write articles for the school and local newspapers. Present a program about the project to others in the school, to the parents, and to the members of the community. Have the children keep their own ongoing record of the experience to save and look back on in the future. It is important for them to take seriously their ability to make a difference. Their attitudes will be greatly influenced by the responses of others around them to their accomplishment.

Conclusion

The theme of this book is that children can and should be given opportunities from an early age to take part in the significant events in their world. As teachers, we can create very powerful opportunities for our students, both in the classroom and extending into the larger world. We can help children become more aware of the vast range of possibilities for participation. We can provide them with experiences of feeling safe, of validation, of responsibility, of relevance, and of cooperation, from which the skills and attitudes of empowered participation can continue to grow. We can help them understand processes of group decision making and the specific process of political elections. In addition, we can structure ways for them to participate in the empowering experience of acting to make a real difference in the world. It is essential that we help students make the connection between who they are and what they do on the one hand, and the challenges and problems in the world around us on the other, before they grow through adolescence and into adulthood. It is our hope that the ideas in this book will help teachers of elementary-age children continue exploring the challenge of turning student apathy and cynicism into participation and empowerment.

Feedback Form

We see this book as a work in progress. Your comments, suggestions and additions will help us revise and improve its depth and quality. We would greatly appreciate your taking the time to share your reactions and any new ideas or materials.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip Code _____

School/Address _____

Subject _____ Age/Grade Level _____

1. Which sections of this guide did you use? Which did you find most successful?

2. Which activities worked well for you? Do you have suggestions for improving them?

3. Which activities worked poorly? How could they be improved? Should they be deleted?

4. Overall, how did students react to this material?

5. Did the overview and introductory article help you teach the activities?

6. Did you share this guide with others in your school? What was their reaction?

7. If you have written an activity or have an article that you think should be included please send it to us along with a signed permission to use note. If we use the contribution, we will credit it appropriately in the new edition.

Comments and Notes

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